

But while the outline of this argument drives at some useful distinctions between the two nations' experiences, it is not entirely successful. For one, the book lacks a coherent, consistently applied theoretical lens, with the result being that the empirical case study chapters often meander in the absence of a framework for organising the broader comparison. For example, he introduces the 'Muslim politics' approach pioneered by Eickelman and Piscatori at several points in the text, but otherwise fails to follow up or structure the analysis around its insights. Also odd is Mahmud's invocation of the term *shura* (consultation) in the book's title as a term somehow representative of Senegalese Islam, particularly when it appears nowhere in his empirical analysis. For another, the text relies heavily on secondary news sources (particularly BBC.com web reports), even when local reports (particularly from the robust Nigerian press) are readily available. Even if, as Mahmud argues, the book's goal is not to present 'fresh evidence' but rather fresh analysis, this is inexcusable. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Mahmud's effort to heighten the contrast between the Senegalese and northern Nigerian religious experiences by focusing on the organisation of religious movements themselves means that he devotes very little consideration to the most obvious and striking point of difference between the two nations—Nigeria's ~85 million Christians, and their significant impact on the calculations and incentives of Muslim political and religious activists. Any account of Nigeria's sharia implementation process that fails to address how the country's long history of religious power-sharing and the rapid expansion of Christian evangelical movements since the 1970s both contributed to sharia's rise is fundamentally incomplete, even if (as Mahmud does) it also discusses the broader problem of religious violence.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Mahmud's book offers a useful addition to the scant body of recent academic work offering a comparative, regionally driven perspective on Muslim politics in West Africa. Experts on either case will find little here that is new, but the synthesis provides a possible jumping-off point for further work in the field.

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Sierra Leone: A Political History by DAVID HARRIS

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This book supplements rather than surpasses earlier literature on its topic because it focuses on state rather than society in Sierra Leone, and thus

excludes issues such as land ownership, lineage organisation and marriage alliance that would otherwise have provided insight into the 'grass roots' workings of the patrimonial political economy. Even so, we should be grateful for what we have: a deft summation of electoral politics from independence to the one-party state, a careful assessment of four national elections (in 1996, 2002, 2007 and 2012), and a fair-minded review of literature on the civil war and its aftermath.

The analysis of the politics of the rebellion is unsatisfactory, however. This is because it elides the part played by private security operatives in shaping political perceptions of the war through their influence over counter-insurgency strategy. Harris implies that the government's (de facto) minister of defence from 1996 had earlier organised a national civil defence movement, to carry the war to the rebel Revolutionary United Front. This understates the crucial role played by Executive Outcomes, a South African-based private security company, in shaping decisions to seek an outright military solution, and thus to deny the rebel movement political 'space'. Localised militia had, indeed, begun to deploy from 1992. But a 'national' para-military civil defence force emerged only after elections in 1996, with much prompting from Executive Outcomes, as a means to follow up the company's increasingly effective air raids against rebel bases. The most significant of these raids was on the RUF jungle headquarters (The Zogoda) in October 1996, during a ceasefire period intended to protect the Abidjan peace negotiations. The mission was given authorisation by a reluctant government only after a barrage of 'advice' from Executive Outcomes about the need to finish off the rebels militarily (as is made clear in a memoir published by company's founder, not cited by Harris). It was claimed that the rebels had no valid political position. Harris appears to align himself with this view by asserting (without offering evidence) that the RUF leader was devious and opportunistic, and that the movement lacked a political programme (here he is aware of evidence to the contrary, but dismisses it). Ironically, he compares the RUF unfavourably, in terms of political content, to Renamo, even though he concedes that the setting up of the Mozambican rebel movement was the work of Rhodesian and South African counter-insurgency specialists. People with the same background staffed Executive Outcomes in Sierra Leone. They knew the importance of crediting Renamo with political content, and of denying any such content to the RUF. That its military opponents projected the RUF as having no politics is not evidence that it had no politics. Harris also claims the post-war RUF political party was as 'inept as its parent organization', without mentioning that 400 of its Freetown-based political cadres were locked up without charge or trial in May 2000 and not released until six years later.

Aside from these defects, however, the book has much to recommend it, not least its trenchant criticism of the Special Court for War Crimes in Sierra Leone. What is now needed is matching political history from the perspective of local institutions.

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